

Minutes: Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC)

May 18, 2007 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Sandhills Convention Center, North Platte River Room

North Platte, Nebraska

Ruth Miller, chairperson, opened the meeting of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council on May 18, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. at the Sandhills Convention Center, North Platte, Nebraska.

Members present: Ruth Miller, chair; Mary A Frank, Michelle Bartlett, Marcia Corr, Kris Elmshaeuser, Louise Hall-Mountain, Barbara Jackson, Marjorie Kostelnik, Susan Kringle, Terri Lewis, Sali Lindenberger, Kim Madsen, Betty Medinger, Tammy Mittelstaedt, Lynn Mruz, Mary Phillips, "Mike" Queen, Barbara Schliesser, Gaylene Stinman, Joyce Thomas, Carey Winkler, Carrie Witte, Linda Zinke.

Members absent: Sue Adams, Kathy Anderson, Christine Carr, Kim Chase, Eric Dunning, Mary Fran Flood, Kathy Halverson-Rigatuso, Mary Jo Iwan, LeaAnn Johnson, Paul Matson, Todd Reckling, Roger Reikofski, Deb Ross, DiAnna Schimek, Connie Shonka, John Street, Joyce Thomas, Derek Weimer.

Also in attendance:

ECICC Staff: Terry Rohren, facilitator; Susan Dahm, secretary.

Technical assistants: Carol Puffer–*Early Childhood Training Center*; Amy Bunnell, Shirley Pickens-White–*Nebraska Health and Human Services System*; Melody Hobson, Joan Luebbers–*Nebraska Department of Education*.

Guests: April Wilson, Colleen Hodges--*Parents, EDN-Ogallala*; Jo Lee–*Educational Service Unit 16*; Peggy Manley–*Panhandle Community Services*; Cheryl Bales, Ruth Burke, Renee Callaghan, Kristy Chessmore, Kim Cooper, Colleen Hodges, Susan Roe, Kathy Schweitzer–*Planning Region Team #27*; Jean Jensen–*Volunteers of America Preschool*.

AGENDA:

1. Listening Opportunity regarding Early Childhood Services in Western Nebraska

Guests from Western Nebraska presented information about their programs, described challenges and successes of the early childhood system in their areas, and suggested policy changes to improve services for young children. Presenters were: Ruth Burke, Planning Region Team #27–North Platte Public Schools; Jean Jensen, Volunteers of America Preschool (Early Childhood Grantee), Lewellen; and Peggy Manley, Head Start/Early Head Start Program, Panhandle Community Services, Gering. Colleen Hodges presented her family's story about their experiences with the Early Development Network (EDN) in North Platte and described the personal support and assistance that they had received through EDN.

In their presentations, speakers identified aspects of early childhood programs in Western Nebraska:

Successes:

- Local early childhood services are helping families and children through many changes.
- In tracking and reporting children's progress and learning outcomes, local groups are adapting to shifting timelines.
- Preschool is now seen as an essential service in Western Nebraska communities.
- Preschool opportunities are especially significant for preparing children who would fall in the bottom third of the elementary classroom.
- Successful partnerships have developed between Head Start and local school districts.

- Local communities have developed considerable expertise in the education and care of young children.

Challenges:

- Regular referrals to Early Intervention (EDN) from the medical community, including providing preparation of medical students and new medical personnel with knowledge about the early intervention system.
- Intermittent phone service due to poverty inhibits regular contact with families.
- Limited interaction with families of children in preschool—although transportation provided by a preschool is important to ensuring children’s attendance, it also limits informal contact with families who might otherwise deliver their children to preschool.
- Maintaining the best possible ratio of typically developing children with children who have special needs to ensure everyone learns and develops. (At times a classroom might have up to 50% children with disabilities due to federal guidelines and availability of positions in all programs.)
- Poverty and very difficult living situations increase children’s social and emotional needs and raise demands on staff and classrooms.
- Flat funding for 3 years or more has necessitated reductions in staff.

Suggestions for changes in policy:

- Allow children to enter kindergarten based on children’s individual needs rather than requiring attendance by a mandatory age.
- Provide a mechanism to allow children who are five years old but not kindergarten-ready to enroll in early childhood grant-funded programs (NDE).
- Provide \$20,000 grants to support early childhood services for 3 year olds and move 4 year olds to the state aid formula.
- Provide long-term, sustainable funding for early childhood services.
- Simplify required assessment instruments—High Scope COR, which is currently used, is complex and lengthy.
- Include funds for monitoring early childhood grant programs to ensure they are serving children well.
- Continue to encourage partnerships between early childhood programs, schools districts, and Head Start programs.
- Use best practice information from the Early Head Start programs in Nebraska to develop criteria for the new Birth-3 endowment grants. Key components that should be considered are: a health component, prenatal care and breastfeeding support, knowing how babies learn, and creating environments that support babies’ development and learning.

Council members asked questions and responded to questions from the guests. Guests and Council members discussed at length several of the challenges and suggestions posed by presenters.

At 11:45 a.m., Ruth Miller convened the regular meeting of the Council after thanking the presenters and guests for their presentations and participation. Guests and presenters were invited to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

2. Opening and Announcements:

i. Approval of Minutes

Motion, seconded: To approve the ECICC minutes of February 18, 2007, as submitted and provided to members in the pre-meeting packet.

- Correction to the spelling of Paul Matson’s name was requested.
- The motion to approve the minutes as corrected passed by unanimous voice vote. There were no abstentions.

ii. Review of activities

Ruth Miller briefly reviewed ECICC activities since the last meeting on February 18:

- Revised correspondence to the Governor suggesting that an ECICC parent member be considered for representation on the Special Education task force.
- Planned for the Economic Impact Study Report roll out
- Updated legislative bill status report.
- Elected Tammy Mittelstaedt as ECICC vice-chair.
- Developed calendar of proposed dates for next ECICC meeting.

iii. Announcements

- Ruth explained the format for the remainder of the meeting with work groups to meet during the lunch period.
- Barb Schliesser introduced Amy Bunnell, the Part C Coordinator for the Health and Human Services System (HHSS). Amy will attend ECICC meetings as a technical assistant.

3. Working lunch

Meeting participants worked in small groups during the lunch period. Guests were invited to join in the small group work of the Gaps and Barriers Committee, the Legislative and Communications Committee, and the Financing Task Force. (The Family Leadership Team met prior to the opening of the meeting.)

4. Public Comment

- Carrie Witte informed Council members that there are 7600 child care and education businesses in Nebraska, which means competition for enrollment in many communities. The small businesses are concerned about their enrollment if children from low-income families are moved into public education programs.
- Susan Kringle thanked ECICC members for their support during her family's ordeal with their house fire.

5. Reports from working sessions**• Family Leadership Team**

Tammy Mittelstaedt reported that visitors had joined the Family Leadership Team's pre-meeting discussion and provided a perspective on issues from the western part of the state regarding services, availability of specialized pediatric care, distances for accessing special care, and reimbursement for these expenses.

Action:

In response to a prior Council request that asked the Family Leadership Team to suggest a representative for the Governor's Special Education Task Force (LB316), the team proposed that Michelle Bartlett's name be submitted to the Governor; however, since Michelle's eligibility for the task force may be an issue because she home-schools her son, the team also proposed Carey Winkler as an alternate. ECICC will submit these names in a letter to Governor Heineman.

• Legislative and Communications Committee (LCC)

Terry Rohren reported for the LCC on several LCC activities:

- Legislative update: Terry provided a handout on the status of several legislative bills. She called attention to the addition of the safe haven bill, which was added since the last ECICC meeting.

- Development of an information sheet for legislators: Legal opinions from HHSS and NDE are that the descriptive information provided in the draft copy is within the advisory scope of ECICC. The LCC will put together a new timeline for distributing the information sheet to legislators. A copy of the draft was provided to meeting participants.
- *Action:*
The LCC recommended that the ECICC representatives for the visit to the Governor include Ruth Miller, ECICC chair; Tammy Mittelstaedt, ECICC vice-chair; Derek Weimer and/or Kathy Anderson, representing the LLC; and Eric Thompson, author of the Economic Impact Study; and that the topics to be discussed include the Economic Impact Study report, highlights from the 2006 ECICC Report to the Governor, and follow up questions from the July 2006 meeting.

Motion by Kim Madsen, seconded by Terri Lewis: to approve the recommendation of the LCC for the Governor's visit. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

- o Terry Rohren will schedule the visit and develop talking points.
- o Terry will check whether she can represent the LCC if Derek or Kathy cannot participate in the visit to the Governor.

- **Gaps and Barriers Committee (GBC)**

Carey Winkler reported for the GBC. Discussion items included:

- Part C Annual Performance Report (APR), the related Part C Family Survey returns, and the APR-reported drop in verification numbers for children with disabilities ages birth to three. This drop puts Nebraska in a "red flag" area for OSEP (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs). Planning Region Teams are addressing the issue by conducting a self assessment of their regional data and Child Find activities.
- Proposed changes in Part C regulations are currently open for public input. The Co-Leads will provide information about the proposed revisions as the information becomes available.
- Questions from guests about CAPTA verifications, referral and identification were addressed during the GBC work group session.

- **Financing Task Force**

Betty Medinger provided a draft copy of an information fact sheet (FAQ) to be used in the "roll out" for the Economic Impact Study Report. Several organizations, businesses, and individuals have been identified to receive the information. A press release and press conference are also being planned as part of the roll out. The news release will include a website link to access a full copy of the report. (Also see #8 below.)

Action:

Motion by Linda Zinke, seconded by Barb Schliesser: To approve the content of the Economic Impact Study Report FAQ for dissemination. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

5. **Plan for Positive Behavior Supports**

Barb Jackson presented for Carol Fichter and updated meeting participants on the development of the strategic plan for promoting and providing training for Positive Behavior Support teams in early childhood. Carol Fichter is working on the professional development part of the plan, Eleanor Kirkland is looking at infrastructure, and Barb Jackson is beginning to look at evaluation plans. The Council will receive regular updates on the progress of the strategic plan.

6. **Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals**

Terry Rohren used a PowerPoint presentation to provide an overview of Nebraska's development of core competencies for early childhood professionals. Work on the core competencies began after the

completion of Nebraska's Early Learning Guidelines. The work began by defining the core competencies for early childhood—i.e., what adults who work with children need to know, understand, and be able to do. Ensuring that these competencies apply across all rules guiding early childhood programs is also criteria for the core competencies. Terry reviewed the development process, the representation on the leadership team, and defined the knowledge areas and levels within the knowledge areas. The first draft of the core competencies was written in the summer of 2006, followed by review and revisions. Terry briefly explained the review process and said that the draft is currently being reviewed again and will be revised based on the input received. When completed, the competencies will be voluntary and will be periodically updated to keep up with developments in the field. Terry made copies of the March 2007 draft available to meeting participants. The draft is also available at:

http://www.esu3.org/ectc/projects_opp/core_competencies_comp_book.pdf

7. Early Childhood Updates

Marcia Corr reported on developments in two areas of early childhood education:

- **Early Childhood Education Endowment (Birth-to-Three Endowment)**
Marcia reported that the Governor appointed the following persons to serve as the Board of Trustees for the Endowment fund: Doug Christensen, Commissioner, Nebraska Department of Education; Christine Z. Peterson, CEO, Nebraska Health and Human Services System; Mel Clancy to represent the at-risk urban areas; Beth Schuler to represent at-risk rural areas; and Helen Raikes and Jessie Rasmussen who were nominated by the endowment provider (Nebraska Children and Families Foundation-NCFF). The Board of Trustees will hold its first meeting on May 21, 2007. Their role is to administer the birth-to-three endowment grants. Marcia explained the grant funding mechanism, which will use interest earned from public and private contributions to the endowment fund. She noted that the private provider (NCFF) has already raised \$5 million and is in the process of raising the additional \$15 million as required by the legislation. The first grants should occur within the next year, as decided by the Board of Trustees. The NDE Office of Early Childhood has informally collected ideas and suggestions to take to the Board as they begin their work.
- **Rule 11 (Regulations for Early Childhood Education Programs)**
Marcia reported that a third round of hearings on Rule 11 revisions was completed last month. The majority of concerns expressed during the hearings were regarding the number of program hours, certified staff, and providing meals/snacks. If the State Board of Education approves the revisions at their June meeting, the Rule will move to the Attorney General's Office for signature. The hope is that the revised Rule will be ready by fall 2007. Marcia thanked all who participated in the revision and hearing process. She noted that there is still a need for more public understanding about certified staff, as well as the need for higher education to recruit more early childhood educators.

8. Economic Impact Study Report/Child Care

- Betty Medinger reviewed the plans for the roll out of the Economic Impact Study Report, which include:
 - Listing of hard copy and e-mail links to ECICC.
 - Printing the report.
 - Disseminating a FAQ sheet (talking points) about the findings of the report.
 - Informing the Governor about the findings from the study.
 - Finalizing the press release and carrying out the dissemination plans.
- Betty reported that LB327 did not pass. The bill was to allow HHSS to pay child care providers less than the 60th percentile of the market rate survey. The market rate survey has been

completed and HHSS has funds to pay providers at the 60th percentile of the market rate survey for those that receive subsidy.

- Betty also explained LB 267, which proposed to increase the threshold for families eligible for child care subsidies to 185% of the federal poverty level. An amendment to the bill proposed increasing the threshold to the 150%. The bill did not pass. Nebraska's current eligibility threshold of 120% of the federal poverty level puts the state in the bottom tier for child care subsidies.
- Betty reported that the development of the child care regulations is moving forward and will be a positive addition for the state.

Terry thanked meeting participants for their attendance. Council members will receive a follow-up survey on the meeting format and content.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Next meeting: Friday, August 24, 2007

MEETING HANDOUTS:

- ✓ ECICC Roster Updates
- ✓ Minutes: ECICC Steering Committee, April 16, 2007
- ✓ Minutes: ECICC Gaps and Barriers Committee, February 16, 2007
- ✓ Minutes: ECICC Legislative and Communications Committee, February 16, 2007
- ✓ Minutes: ECICC Legislative and Communications Committee, April 12, 2007
- ✓ Status report of 2007 Legislative bills pertaining to early childhood as of May 14, 2007
- ✓ Information sheet: Changes to LB 316
- ✓ Information sheet: Head Start Reauthorization
- ✓ Draft: Information sheet on early childhood for Nebraska legislators
- ✓ Status report: HSSCO Activity, May 2007
- ✓ Draft press release: "New Report Finds Early Care Industry Boosts State Economy," May 3, 2007
- ✓ Draft: Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals
- ✓ Letter inviting nominations for appointment to state boards and commissions with application form